



## DAVID MANGENNER GOUGH

**David mangenner Gough is a proud trawlwoolway man who descends from bungana (chief) manalargenna's oldest daughter, woretemoeteyemer of north-east Tasmania. Dave has spent many years passionately sharing his cultural knowledge with educators and students across the state. He is the cultural advisor for University of Tasmania, Co-Chair of the QVMAG Aboriginal Advisory Council, board member of the Aboriginal Advisory Council of TMAG, Co-Ordinator of Tiagarra Tasmanian Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Devonport and Chair of Six Rivers Aboriginal Corporation, Devonport. Dave has been heavily involved in protection of Aboriginal heritage sites across the state; he currently has works in permanent display at Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston and was a commissioned artist in *10 Days on the Island 2017*. His work received a Highly Commended in the *Bay of Fires Art Prize 2018*.**

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I'm a proud trawlwoolway Tasmanian Aboriginal man.

My mother is Tasmanian Aboriginal – my father, who is from Glasgow, Scotland, arrived in Australia when he was a little boy. I was born in Geelong, Victoria in 1969 and while I was growing up the family moved when Dad was transferred to a range of destinations for work. He worked for Kodak for many years, and was eventually transferred to the position of Laboratory Manager of the Perth Kodak Western Australia Kodak laboratory in Perth.

My family separated while we were in West Australia – I was a young teen at the time. I wasn't completely

focused on my schooling during that period – there were all kinds of personal upheavals and distractions, and when the family split up I stayed in Western Australia. I had formed a social connection with a group of friends during my teenage years, and spent about four or so years involved in crews of hip-hop street dancers. We'd meet in the city to dance together, and afterwards we'd split our earnings. It was a positive time – we kept an eye out for each other. Things weren't so easy, but there was a good supportive community feeling. I did an assortment of odd jobs to make ends meet, and stayed with friends. From time to time I travelled back and forth to Melbourne and Sydney to stay with Mum and then Dad, but eventually

I ended up back in Perth again. I knew the city; I knew the streets. Although there was certainly a sense of harshness there, I knew the place well enough to feel a sense of security. I didn't really know a sense of community anywhere else. But as times changed and the scene changed and other music genres moved into favor, we all grew up and members of the groups moved on.

In my early twenties I got married. We wanted to move out of the city to seek some sense of peace and to remove ourselves from city life. The pull to going bush on country was strong, so my wife and I moved to the wheat belt in South-West Western Australia - one and half hours from Perth, where we purchased a run-down 1910 shopfront in a small country town.

Over twelve years, I restored and extended that building that stood right by the main highway. I became involved in the local Noongar community, and I learned a great deal about community, about Noongar culture, and developed a range of hands-on practical skills and survival skills. It was a time of great learning: about people, places and connection. It was a time that's shaped me a great deal. We were thirty-five kilometers from Narrogin, the nearest town that had a shop, so in the beginning I had to hitch-hike down the highway to get food every week until I had the skills to cobble a vehicle together from an assemblage of old parts.

During that time, my sister Julie had returned to Tasmania where our Aboriginal heritage and family are connected. I was always dreaming about ways to get back home; the draw to return was very strong. Julie was instrumental in helping me come back many times to connect with country. Whenever I was away from my Tasmania I'd hold her in my heart; trying to create a sense of a supportive community when we lived in country West Australia. We were a close-knit community at that time.

When I left the South West, we moved back to the Perth where I undertook more conventional employment working in the automotive industry where I worked my way up within customer service. We bought a house in the city. But after I'd returned to Tasmania for a few holidays I decided I had to move to Tasmania. The yearning to be on home country was too strong and evident. At the same time my mother was also talking of returning to Tasmania from living in country Victoria. Julie was living in Hobart, but both Mum and myself were keen to move to East Devonport, where we have strong family connections and it's my mother's special childhood place. In 2010 we returned, and since then I've been heavily involved in my community, my culture and the protection of my land. I've served roles in Aboriginal conservation, with Tiagarra, the Aboriginal Museum and Cultural Centre in Devonport, and as Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Advisory

board of the Queen Victoria Museum in Launceston. Our aims to build a gallery for our people – the Gallery of the First Tasmanians through working with the Launceston Council and the State Government to acquire the funding to build a state of the art gallery, have been realized: we now have a gallery that's been nominated for three museum awards! And highly commended.

I constructed the dioramas and many of the objects in them. Because so much of our history has focused on the thirty years of fighting during the Black Wars, the decision was made to re-focus attention on the clans and tribes that had supported each other during the process of living on this land in a sustainable manner for at least fifty thousand years.

After I was elected to the Aboriginal Heritage Council of Tasmania, over a two-year period we focused on changing the state legislation protecting Aboriginal heritage sites in Tasmania. We've been successful in changing the former legislation by making six amendments to the Act, and as a result we have established recognition through legislation that Tasmanian Aboriginal culture is ongoing. The previous Act had stated that our culture had ceased in 1876 with the death of Truganini, so the overturning of this statement meant that we were able to make claims for recognition of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture as an ongoing and vital development. The penalties for destroying Aboriginal heritage have also been raised to the equitable with those applied to the destruction of other cultural heritage sites. We've changed history in achieving these changes, and for me personally, this is a source of great pride.

For the past seven years I've worked as a sharer of Aboriginal knowledge working with the younger generations. For the past three years I've also held the role of Cultural Advisor to the University of Tasmania; in that role I advise the university on cultural matters and perform in a number of other roles at open days and education days at the university; serving on cultural awareness training; leading Welcome to Country ceremonies in the north-west of the state, and at the opening of Orientation Days.

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**What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)**

Where I live, and the bulk of what I do now, is not located a city; I'm living seven kilometers from where my family survived during colonization in a small town they started in 1847 and settled the area as the granddaughter of a chief of a nation on the east coast and a convict. I'm living and breathing on what for me is sacred land. It's taken me a long time to get here. I feel



this through my family – they’re all from here. I would have always been here if it hadn’t been for having been displaced. I see it as my own country. The effects of generational trauma and displacement are part of what tore me from here and what I deal with on a daily basis. I’m trying to help the younger generations and other generations understand what’s happened in the past in order to move forward and heal. My main focus is on protection of country and searching for ways of living on the land in terms of low impact. I’ve been involved in the movements to protect the Tarkine, our ancient forests and our landscapes – I feel I am a vessel driven by my ancestors to protect country.

### **What might make it difficult?**

That’s a hard question – because so many people now want to know about our culture here, a lot of the questions inevitably come with the challenge of negotiating political decisions. I’m passionately driven to protect country, and to teaching our young people and I have to engage with government to make these decisions. As a result, it’s hard for me and also for the people around me who are affected by the amount of time and energy I have to devote to these objectives.

### **And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?**

The responsibilities of living on country here – the responsibilities of community and place – weigh heavily on personal resources. It’s had its difficulties, but in order to avoid overloading you have to mediate the ways in which you work, and the number of projects you take on. For the last Ten Days on the Island I did an installation called Resilience, that I situated in the grounds sat Tiagarra – it’s that kind of resilience that you have to build up and draw from if you are to survive as a cultural worker who’s dedicated to working closely with community and place.

### **Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?**

The kind of projects I’m working with and developing are community based – I tend to try to build opportunities to develop ‘art projects’ into the kinds of cultural activities that are ongoing and that change the communities not only in terms of their engagement with the work, but also in building in ongoing practices that require the community to re-engage – both with each other and with place. So yes – these kinds of projects do fundamentally alter both local communities and local places.

### **Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?**

Yes to be honest, I did. As I matured, I was driven to return to doing what I’m now doing. My own country, as a trawlwoolway man, traditional country the North-East of Tasmania It’s a complex history – many of us carry hurt and sadness as a result of what’s happened

and as a result of dispossession, so that point of communicating again has not been an easy process. There are all kinds of issues involved in connecting with country and heritage and the mixed feelings that come along with it, and dealing with them is more or less a daily struggle. Much of my sister Julie’s art has addressed the impact of the Black Wars on our families. Both Julie and I have discussed evidence of this history publicly – everyone is still trying to work through how these things have impacted on us to the present day. It’s had a major effect on all of us. It’s part of healing and part of continuing our traditions.

### **How does it feel now?**

I know I’m where I’m supposed to be, and doing what I’m supposed to be doing. I light my fire sticks up, I walk on my own country, and in the same week I’m also knocking on the door of government and doing the best I can to walk in two worlds. There’s some land here that my community looks after and protects – it’s half an hour from here – I go onto that land to re-charge so that I can once again return to sitting at the same table as government members – to do what I need to do in terms of securing what needs to be secured for my people and my country.

### **How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?**

I know I have to regularly ‘return to country’. If I do too much, I get depleted. I go onto country and I come back re-charged. But I also feel that when I’m sharing country with people – with schools and children – I get fed back myself, and the symptoms of the generational trauma appeases as my culture gives me strength and replenishes me. I am both a learner and a teacher – it’s an ongoing process of learning from others and giving back to others.

### **What is the role of your work?**

My passion for protecting my country, my landscape and my heritage.

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